

Christianity and Society

THE BIBLICAL IDEA OF VOCATION

by

JOHN HUTCHISON

GOD, GODS, AND DR. GEORGE GALLUP

by

CHARLES D. KEAN

THE PRACTICE OF FAITH

by

W. BURNET EASTON JR.

PLANS FOR THE FUTURE

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NOTICE TO MEMBERS OF THE F.S.C.

An important announcement of future plans of the Fellowship is carried on Page 19 of this journal.

The annual spring conference is planned for May 20-21, in or near New York. The committee is investigating the possibilities of meeting out of town in some "retreat" center, as was sometimes done in pre-war years. The decision will depend upon the expense and convenience of any such possible arrangements. Notices of the place and program will be mailed to members.

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EDITORIALS

The "Third Force" in Europe

The external condition for the survival of democracy in Europe is the European Recovery Program, now making its tortuous way through our Congress. One hopes it will not be mangled beyond recognition. The internal condition for the preservation of democracy is the gradual emergence of what Leon Blum has defined as the "third force." This force represents the amalgamation of Christian and socialistic forces, ready to prevent communist totalitarianism from the left and reaction from the right.

The emergence of this third force is of special interest to readers of this journal because it represents a development in line with the whole thought of the Fellowship of Socialist Christians. The third force requires the liquidation of the age old "Kulturkampf" between socialism and Christianity. It requires that there be a very considerable body of Christians who, though rejecting the socialization of property as a means of the final redemption of mankind, do espouse it as a necessity of social justice. It requires that the intimate alliance of Christianity with middle class conservatism be broken.

Under conditions of European impoverishment this socialistic development in Christian thought and life has taken place. A high official of the World Council of Churches recently declared that the first General Assembly of the World Council of Churches, to meet in Amsterdam this summer, would have to express its sense of the importance of the "third force" if it were to say anything relevant to the political future of continental Europe at all.

On the other hand the third force requires that socialists, when they find it necessary to distinguish themselves from communists on the issue of liberty, also learn enough about the deeper issues of life to realize that the old Marxist doctrine, according to which religion is an opiate, must be jettisoned. They must learn that a political program, which raises itself to a religious dimension is bound to end in totalitarianism. If it has no other frame of reference for the life of the individual than the political state which brings about the social revolution, it will end in totalitarianism. In that sense Stalinism is not a corruption, but the logical development, of Marxism.

In France the conditions for the emergence of the third force were: (1) The gradual recognition by the socialists that the so-called working class solidarity with the communists was a fiction which the tactics of the communist party belied. (2) The emergence of the Gaullist movement which drew off the more reactionary elements of the Christian party and thus created the possibility of cooperation between socialists and left-wing Catholics. (3) The success of this alliance in defeating communist wrecking tactics and thus raising the hopes of France that it would not have to go in for a Gaullist dictatorship in order to avoid a communist one. The third force is not yet securely established in France but it has a bare chance of succeeding.

In Italy, on the other hand, where the hand of clericalism on the Christian party is much heavier than in France, Catholic

politics have moved steadily to the right. Partly in consequence of this, socialism has not disassociated itself from communism. The election in April will be fought out between Christian conservatism and socialist-communist radicalism. A small group of socialists under Sarragat have disassociated themselves from the majority of the party but the policy of the Catholic party gives them little ground to stand on. There is, in short, no real democratic middle ground in Italy and anything can happen there.

German politics will not be fully developed until German independence is achieved. That is quite a distance in the future. Meanwhile the understanding between socialists and the left of the Christian movement is proceeding with gratifying speed. The solidity of British political life is due to the fact that the "third force," which is being born in such pain on the continent, was always the basis of the British labor party position. That party was never consistently Marxist. It was always an amalgam of socialist and radical Christian forces. It was therefore able to come to power, as representing a national community, and not a force against the national community.

American political thought is not so sharply defined as to make the "third force" meaningful for us. Communism is no threat to us. Our reactionary forces do gain some support from Christian thought but not in as explicit a way as in Europe. Our task is to develop a significant second force of democracy which understands that liberty is not the only value of life but that liberty and community, freedom and order must be made to support each other.

Protestants, Catholics and Secularists

Protestants are really in a rather sad position in the fight between Catholicism and secularism. The Catholics regard secularism as the primary peril to the good life. It is their theory that people who do not believe in God finally fall into the anarchy of pure self-interest. The secularists believe that "dogmatists" who believe in God are

the real peril to democracy. Some secularists believe in other values besides liberty. But confidence in liberty is what holds various types of secularists together, at least in our liberal society.

The Catholics, at least the less fanatic ones, would like to have Protestants as allies against secularism. The Catholics do not accept our faith as fully Christian; but at least we believe in God. The secularists actually have us as allies half the time in their fight against Catholicism. They are willing to tolerate our religion because we don't seem to be as religious as the Catholics. We are at least, not as dogmatic. Thus we are the grey mass which looks black from the viewpoint of the whites and white from the viewpoint of the blacks.

Is there anything to rescue Protestantism from this unenviable position? We might turn to New Testament religion for help. We might insist that any position which sees peril to the good only in the position of the foe and not in the self is not good Christianity. "Whosoever thou art that judges, thou thyself doest the same thing." The Catholics believe that men who believe in God are more virtuous than those who do not; but such a faith does not take the fury and the fanaticism into account which arise when we make God too simply the ally of our interests. The test of a true Christian faith is not so much whether we believe in God "for the devils believe and tremble"; but whether we know that he is our Judge as well as the Judge of our enemy.

Secularism in its worst varieties may be pure relativism and hedonism. But a great deal of secularism is actually a protest against the simple identification of God with, let us say, Franco's social system, or any other relative political idea which the church cherishes. The secularists think that the best way of getting rid of religious fanaticism is to get rid of religion. But they have failed to take into account that even more pagan idolatries arise in this vacuum. The secularists are frequently romantic universalists. But secularism may end in the worship of a state, or a nation or of

some relative value such as freedom or democracy.

If Protestantism wants its own position, let it fight against the tendency to profane the sacred, a tendency to which all traditional religion is prone, whatever its principles. This profanization takes place when the majesty of God or the sanctity of Christ is claimed for something which has no right to share in that majesty or sanctity. The historic church is, among others, incapable of claiming such an absolute sanctity. When it does it makes the sacred profane. Let Protestantism fight with equal fervor against a secularism which empties life of meaning and then allows "seven devils more grievous than the first" to enter the vacuum. The sin of secularism is not so much atheism as idolatry. Secularism is full of jackpines which grow upon the soil of a denuded forest.

Let Protestantism, in brief, preach the judgment and mercy of God to the circumcised and the uncircumcised and make quite sure that neither circumcision or uncircumcision avails in God's sight. (We are adopting the phraseology of the prophets who were as clear on this point as the New Testament is.)

A genuinely Biblical faith must be preached because it alone can answer the need of the human heart and penetrate through all the pitiful pretenses which men practice in the name of both religion and irreligion. But it might be added that such a faith can render a greater service to "democracy" than either alternative faith. For in the one case democracy is denied because a church, which claims a monopoly on the "oracles" of God, can not enter fully into the give and take of a democratic society. In the other case a faith makes democracy or freedom or even some lesser value the final end; and destroys democracy by self-worship. A democracy which believes only that all men should have the right to believe anything or nothing is on the road to becoming a culturally empty association of empty individuals.

Palestine

A very dangerous game is being played in Palestine. It is now quite clear that there is a real division in the American government on the issue. The defense forces are not in favor of partition. The political leadership of the administration is still in favor, having its eye upon the political consequences of renouncing the decision in favor of partition.

The army strategists oppose the present plan partly because they are afraid of losing Arabian oil for strategic purposes and partly because they fear that Russia will use the present situation to worm into the Near East. Russia could do that either by insisting upon a big nation police force, which would bring a Russian contingent into Palestine; or by capturing political control of Palestine through heavy immigrations from the east. Or at least that is what is feared. A small nations police force seems to have been the first choice of our state department. But the small nations are not disposed to furnish contingents for it. A volunteer force is not favored because it is assumed that only Jews would volunteer and that the conflict would thereby be aggravated.

In this hopeless situation we have not lifted the embargo upon arms for the Jews in Palestine. There can only be one reason for such an incredible policy. That is the threat of an Arab embargo on oil. Worry about oil animates not merely the military strategists but also the Marshall plan strategists; for the plan requires oil to start the machinery of Europe. Here the Arabs have us by the throat, or more exactly by the pipe-line.

The unbelievable policy of Britain in not allowing any one from the United Nations into Palestine until a few weeks before the British move out, can only be interpreted as pure sabotage. It can have no conceivable purpose but to make the present plan unworkable. The position could not be taken, incidentally, if there were not some secret connivance with it on the part of our defense forces, who are undoubtedly glad

that Britain is preserving the good will of the Arabs, an asset which we have completely lost.

All this represents a very dangerous game. If the purpose is to get the whole problem dumped back into the lap of the United Nations in the hope of getting a new settlement, possibly along the lines of a bi-national state, the game might well end in wrecking the whole structure of the United Nations.

The question is whether there is any way out of this sorry impasse. Could an effort at conciliation between Arabs and Jews be tried? Previous efforts have failed because the Arabs insist upon joint control of immigration in a bi-national state. Upon that point the Jews can simply not yield. The Arabs might yield a point upon which they have previously been adamant. But that would be possible only if they could be convinced that we will unyieldingly support the present scheme. The ambiguities of our own position are not calculated to change the previous Arab intransigence. So the situation remains tragic and precarious.

Our own guess is that the defense people are, as usual, thinking too much in terms of purely military strategy. If we lifted the arms embargo and allowed a volunteer force to be recruited, and at the same time permitted the Arabs to organize their defense, we might lose oil, which would be valuable in the event of a war. But our policy would have more meaning in preventing a larger war. The possible destruction of the United Nations, which may be the final consequence of the present policy might bring other consequences in its wake too horrible to contemplate.

The Glories of "Free Enterprise"

America is very proud of its "free-enterprise" economy. The paeans of praise which are sung to it have become more extravagant since the war than at any time in recent decades. There is something very ironic about this flood of self-congratulation at a very period when it becomes increasingly apparent that, even with the high

productivity of our farms and factories, we can not assure an equitable distribution of our wealth or prevent full employment from forcing us into an increasing inflationary spiral. Our experience proves that an economy as free as ours must be a little sick (with unemployment) to preserve a modicum of health. If it becomes healthy with full employment it makes demands upon the market which our productivity can not satisfy. Our health augurs a future sickness of more severe proportions. Thus our men of wealth, just as in the day of Amos "put far away the evil day and cause the seat of violence to come near." War time prosperity tempted even the best of us to forget that we had an unsolved problem. Post-war prosperity reveals the problem in the inflationary spiral. But the optimists, blinded by interest, try to maintain a studied and bogus optimism. They sing the praise of free enterprise with more and more raucous enthusiasm, the more it becomes apparent that there is something radically wrong with our system. One is reminded of the songs which break out in hysteria and in order to hide hysteria on a sinking ship.

Let us look at the record: Profits after taxes in industry reached 10 and a half billion dollars in war-time. In 1946 they rose to 12 and a half billion and were probably 17 billion in 1947. But the proposal for the reimposition of the excess profits tax is greeted by all men of privilege with outraged cries. It will destroy our free economy they declare. Meanwhile prices continue to rise, though we have experienced a momentary break in food prices.

In the steel industry the profits doubled while the wages increased 18 and a half cents per hour. In the mines wages were increased 27 cents per hour and coal increased at \$1 per ton. Meanwhile the rise in prices has outrun the rise in wages. The price index before the slight break in February showed that prices were 69% above the 1936 average and 27% above the 1946 average. They were 71% above the 1939 figure, just before the war. The consumer dollar is worth slightly more than half of

its pre-war value. No wages on industrial workers have increased in proportion; and the unorganized white collar workers and fixed income classes have been left behind completely. Their inability to buy anything but barest necessities certainly contributes to the present downward trend. We will probably not face a serious deflation because the European Recovery Program exports will prevent the price level from sinking catastrophically. The fact that there will probably be only a small shake-down of prices will leave the fixed income middle classes in permanently straightened circumstances for the next decade. The automatic market can not be said to work in the direction of even the most minimal justice in this field of profits, prices, and wages.

Increased production is supposed to solve all these problems but it never does. In 1947 meat prices went up partly because we were eating 20 pounds per person per year more food. We exported 17% more food in 1947 than before the war but we produced 30% more. The increase in exports was therefore not solely responsible for the spiral. The higher demand for food on the home market, due to full employment was partly responsible. In order to bring prices down, we either have to let Europe starve or wait until higher prices drive down the consumption at home. This is what the precious value of freedom comes to in economic life.

It must be granted that the controls of rationing and price ceilings are difficult. They are particularly dangerous when a nation lacks the minimal honesty to observe the controls without establishing black markets. In the matter of observing controls we are probably a little better than continental nations, but we are highly undisciplined compared to Britain. Our newspapers fail to understand that Britain would be completely undone if it did not maintain the controls which we decry as checks upon productivity; and they fail to point out that our alleged miracles of production fail to solve the problems created by our lack of order and discipline in distribution. We can still live in this com-

pletely unmanaged economy because we are very wealthy. No other nation could live at all. But even we can not live well or maintain our health.

This then is the shaky foundation of the vaunted system of freedom which is supposed to make our "American way of life" superior to any in the world. When one reads the extravagant appreciations of the system one has a religious feeling that nemesis must overtake a nation which indulges in such uncritical devotion to very dubious principles of justice. For the moment that nemesis will probably be delayed because we had at least the sense to come to the aid of Europe. As a nation we are slightly drunk but sufficiently sober to give succor to needy friends. Our critics are wrong if they think we give the aid only because we avoid the disaster of our drunkenness that way. Actually there is a genuine impulse of responsibility in our gesture of aid. But fortunately it does help us to ward off the worst perils of our drunkenness.

The delicate balance between the dangers of inflation and deflation is, incidentally, nicely symbolized by the figure of drunkenness. Drunkenness alternates between a false expansiveness and a subsequent deflation and the dark brown taste of the morning after. The songs we sing about our greatness are not genuine songs of joy. They express the hilarity of drunkenness. In that hilarity there is always a premonition of the morning after.

The Morality of Nations

Nothing is quite so difficult as for nations, even when they are friendly, to be fair to each other. Take, for example, our relations to Britain. Britain is impoverished by the war. Even after making heroic efforts to increase her production she will, for some years to come, be about a billion dollars short on her export-import quota. We on the other hand require an excess of exports over imports of five to ten billion dollars to preserve our economic health. The proponents of our free enterprise doctrine give a ridiculous interpretation of this disparity between American wealth and

British poverty. It is supposed to be due to the greater efficiency of capitalistic methods of production in comparison with socialistic ones. Actually Britain has achieved a rate of production which allows her to export 20% more goods than she did in 1938. But she must gain an additional 20% in exports to maintain her standard of living as of 1938.

Britain is poor, in other words, not because her socialistic method of production is inefficient, but because she used up her foreign investments, through which she paid a large part of her food imports before the war. She lost her foreign investments because in the period of 1939-45 the war cost Britain 120 billion dollars while her total national income in the same period was only 170 billion. In the same period of six years our total national income was something like 866 billion. Our war expenses can not be easily estimated. We increased our national debt by about 250 billion. We increased our annual national income during that period from about 100 billion to 200 billion per year. We emerged a wealthier nation both relatively and absolutely from the war, while other nations were impoverished.

If it is remembered that we were in a common struggle in which we frequently emphasised the principle of "equality of sacrifice," it must be apparent that even the generous arrangements of war-time lease-lend and of the projected European recovery program will still leave us far short of the goal of equality of sacrifice. In the light of these figures we may be able to understand why the British regarded the provisions of the British loan agreement as ungenerous and why Europe as a whole, though grateful for the provisions of the European recovery program, can not view our generosity with quite the same enthusiasm as we are inclined to regard it. Its provisions are still in the category of crumbs which fall from Dives' table.

It may be observed incidentally that Europeans may be as unfair to us as we are to them. A table of comparative expenditures was recently published in Europe

which made it appear as if our expenses for lease-lend were the only war-time expenses we contracted.

It requires a good deal of both imagination and grace for nations to be fair to each other. The human imagination usually does not suffice to comprehend a complex situation, which can be presented in its totality only by cold statistics. But even when the facts are comprehended it is difficult for nations to summon the grace to interpret the facts correctly.

We may regard it as axiomatic that nations can only approximate the sense of mutual responsibility and fair play which ethically sensitive individuals sometimes achieve. But we might at least try to refrain from obscuring the realities by the insulting suggestion that our impoverished allies are poor because they do not work as hard as we or because they do not understand the virtues of the competitive struggle. They are poor, partly because they sacrificed more in a common struggle than we; and partly because they have not been favored by nature as much as we.

Spiritual Mobilization

The most recent issue of *Spiritual Mobilization*, organ of confusion which tries to prove that the Christian Gospel and "free enterprise" mean the same thing, expresses worry about inflation. "To break the inflationary spiral," declares the magazine, "there must be a fine sense of altruistic spirit on the part of all concerned." How the beneficiaries of the exorbitant profits of today are to express that altruistic spirit is not disclosed. They must in any event be protected from anything but "voluntary" pressures. These are always more Christian than "compulsory" pressures.

Meanwhile the "crux of the matter is reduction of government expense." Outside of reducing its expense the government must not "exercise controls" because "that" would increase the menace of "police statism." The old bogey of *Spiritual Mobilization* used to be "statism." It has now grown to "police-statism." The magazine reports that 26,000 parsons read it. It has

just awarded a prize of \$2,500 for the best sermon dealing with the topic of Christianity and freedom. It feels very much heartened by all recent developments. Europe, it declares "may be swinging to the right, at least its swing to the left is arrested for the moment." Anything which does not conform to the purest *laissez faire* is "left" for this great proponent of the "spiritual."

There isn't a shred of its kind of "freedom" left on the whole European continent. But the editor rejoices "that he has lived to see the day" in which his once unpopular crusade has become so popular. We hope he's wrong. We hope at least that there aren't really 26,000 parsons in the country to influence, as he says, "untold masses" with the opium which he peddles.

THE BIBLICAL IDEA OF VOCATION

By JOHN HUTCHISON

This paper had its origin in an observation made each year for several years during a course in Bible for college students. Each time through the course the importance of a single Biblical metaphor for an understanding of the Biblical view of life grew larger in my mind. The metaphor is this: in religious experience God speaks and man listens and obeys. This way of construing man's encounter with God has the virtue of emphasizing volition, conceived as the principle of action, in contrast to theory or contemplation. The metaphor of hearing and obeying God is to be set in contrast to the visual metaphor of seeing God. Indeed on the first thought it seemed to me that the former is the distinctive and characteristic concept of Biblical religion, while the latter is peculiar to certain other religions such as Hinduism, Buddhism, and various brands of mysticism. On second thought, or rather third or fourth thought, the facts are much too complex for any such facile distinction as this. Both metaphors of seeing God and of hearing him are to be found throughout the Bible. The patriarchs are described as experiencing theophanies as well as theophonies (if the reader may pardon a rather clumsy Greek pun). Isaiah speaks of seeing the Lord in the temple. Jesus likewise states that purity of heart is the condition of seeing God. Paul saw as well as heard on the Damascus road. Moreover the metaphor of hearing and obeying God is not altogether peculiar to the re-

ligion of the Bible. One finds it at least in Zoroastrianism and Islam. It is also imputed to Socrates in some of the Platonic dialogues. But if the thesis is untenable in this oversimple form, let us try to formulate it adequately. Now of course it must be fully admitted that both of our expressions are metaphors, symbols, as indeed all speaking about God from the human viewpoint must be. The symbol of seeing God does express and guard valuable elements in religious experience as may be seen from its long and honorable employment in the Christian tradition and in other religions as well. However, when it is torn loose from the other symbol of hearing God and doing his will, and then pressed to its last logical conclusion it becomes monistic mysticism — a quite unbiblical, and I should say, anti-biblical kind of religion. This is perhaps to say that the proper use of the word, mystic, is not as a noun denoting a system or kind of religion, but rather as an adjective modifying or qualifying all genuine piety. To be valid in Biblical terms it must be held with, and indeed held under, the other metaphor of hearing and obeying God. In short, the thesis I wish to expound and defend is that the latter metaphor, though surely not the only one in the Bible, is dominant and normative for Biblical religion.

If we may extricate the term "call" from the tangle of superstitious meanings in which it has lately become ensnarled, we

may properly use it for the experience we wish here to analyze. Or recalling the etymology of the word, vocation, we may speak of the Biblical doctrine of vocation. What we mean is that for the Bible the fundamental religious encounter is God's call to man — a call not primarily to communion or contemplation but to action. God says to man in essence two things: (1) "I am the Lord," and (2) "Serve me." Of the two things the second seems more important; for if the Biblical view of action is followed, it is in and through our service of God that our recognition of His Lordship is given. In other words action seems to be the basic category of Biblical religion. And contemplation, meditation, and the like are significant, if we may use a figure, as the pause in the traveler's journey to rest, to review the road already trodden and that which lies ahead. But it is the journey which is finally important.

To say this in different words, God calls us, puts us under orders, and sets us tasks to do in such a way that we become his servants, the instruments by which the divine purpose is accomplished in the world. And for us men, the meaning of our existence consists in responding to this call, in doing what we are thus called to do. Such, in very briefest form, is the Biblical conception of man's fundamental relation to God.

It may be added at this point that this notion of a call has received vivid and thorough expression in recent theological and philosophical literature. To cite just one excellent example, Buber's *I and Thou* argues that the only real basis for the relation between God and man, as well as man and man, lies in the form of direct address. It is an I — Thou relation which can never be reduced to or translated into an I — It relation. This notion of the uniqueness and irreducibility of the personal relation, variously expressed by many writers, may here be regarded as a suggestive attempt to describe the Biblical notion of divine call and human response.

II

Let us now look at a few examples from

the Bible. In Genesis 12:1-3 we read, "Now the Lord said unto Abram, get thee out of thy country and from thy kindred and from thy father's house unto a land which I will show thee, and I will make of thee a great nation and I will bless thee and make thy name great and in thee shall all the families of the earth be blessed." While it is not possible — nor indeed very important — to know anything about the details of this experience which started Abraham on his westward migration, it is profoundly important for the understanding of Biblical religion to see that the life of the father of the Hebrew people was thus regarded as a response to God's call and God's promise. And according to the Biblical account, the experience produced in the mind of Abraham a momentous sense of historic destiny. "I will bless thee and make of thee a great nation . . . and in thee shall all the families of the earth be blessed." Abraham's response to God's call was one of decisive and obedient action. As it were, he bet his life on this experience which must have seemed so preposterous and so arrogant to his contemporaries, and God fulfilled the promise in a way far better and greater than Abraham could possibly have imagined.

The religious experience of Moses was conceived in the same pattern of divine call and human response, with the added element that the resulting sense of historic destiny was construed by Moses in predominantly social and ethical terms. Whatever the nature of the theophany at the burning bush — again we may safely leave its detailed description to historical scholars — for Moses, it was the direct manifestation of a God to whom Moses responded by a life of active service, leading his people from slavery to freedom and social responsibility, creating in the process the ten commandments.

Again in the case of the great prophets of the eighth and seventh centuries, the experience of vocation was the basis of their writings and their careers as prophets. They uniformly regarded themselves as the servants of Jahweh, and they began their words with the preface, "Thus saith the

Lord." This form of thought and address seems to extend back of the literary prophets to the bands of the nebi'im, to the earliest days of prophetic or Jahwist religion. And a careful reading of the Bible will not allow us to regard it as a mere literary form. It was a basic, constitutive form of the religious experience to which the prophets gave expression.

In the case of the literary prophets, they invariably report an experience of some decisive sort by which they believed themselves called of God to the prophetic office. Thus, for example, when Amos' right of free utterance was challenged by Amaziah, the court chaplain, the prophet replied tersely, "I am neither a prophet nor the son of a prophet, But the Lord took me from behind the plow and said, Go speak to my people Israel." Again, we can have no idea of the specific nature of the experience here alluded to, except that for Amos it was decisive, crucial. He who had been a shepherd and farmer became a prophet whose words and deeds were his response to the divine voice which addressed him.

While the external details of Isaiah's call differ widely from those of Amos, the same pattern emerges. God spoke, asking, "Whom shall I send," and Isaiah replied, "Here am I, send me." We note, however, in Isaiah's case that preceding the call was the vision of God with its consequent sense of sin and forgiveness. Thus only as Isaiah was clearly conscious of God and his relation to God, could God set him a task to do. But the prophet's vision in the temple issued in his Commission, in his call to do a job for God. In the case of Hosea, God spoke through the prophet's tragic family experience, and the result was a deep probing of the relation of justice to love in the heart of both man and God. The category of vision assumes more importance in Hosea than in other prophets, perhaps just because of the greater inwardness of Hosea's religion, but nowhere does it supplant or displace the prophet's perception of the divine word which it is his mission to hear and do.

The case of Jeremiah is similar to that of Hosea in both his inwardness and the fact that his religious experience was deeply interfused with details of personal life. Here again, the category of vision seems always to be held with and under the category of hearing and doing God's will. The vividness of Jeremiah's sense of mission is eloquently attested by the doctrine of election which accompanies the story of his call. "Before I formed thee in the belly I knew thee; and before thou camest forth out of the womb I sanctified thee and I ordained thee a prophet to the nations." The passage describing Ezekiel's call is longer than that of other prophets, and, as so much of Ezekiel's book, is characterized by bizarre and fantastic imagery. Yet amid the wheels within wheels, the glassy firmaments and strange lights, we can still plainly discriminate the pattern of divine call and human response. God spoke to Ezekiel and set him a task to do, and the meaning of his life consisted in the faithful performance of this appointed task. Indeed steadfast faithfulness to his mission was one of the predominant traits of the stern soul of Ezekiel. The call of Isaiah of Babylon is stated so briefly that one has difficulty in making out its meaning. "The voice said 'cry,' and I said 'What shall I cry?'" The prophets' mission was thus, as in the case of the other prophets, to speak for God. In response to Isaiah's further query, the burden of his message is declared by the same divine voice to be the mutability and morality of man and all his works, in contrast to the eternity of God. But what is most important to see here is that this insight produced in the mind of the prophet an awareness of destiny, indeed a philosophy of history, decisive for the whole succeeding history of his people and for Christianity as well.

Turning now to the New Testament the same categories of vocation emerge from a study of Jesus' religious experience, particularly in the early chapters of the gospels which deal with John the Baptist, the baptism of Jesus, and the temptations. Without going into an exhaustive analysis of these sections of scripture, it may be asserted that

they indicate the emergence in Jesus' mind of a sense of mission, of a task to do for God. It is interesting to speculate whether this task was from the first conceived by Jesus in clearly messianic terms or whether the messianic consciousness gradually emerged in the course of Jesus' life. In any event it was John with his fiery prophetic preaching who first made Jesus vividly aware of God's will, who first woke in him the sense of mission, which is recorded in Jesus' experience of the divine voice at the baptism. The temptation may be taken as Jesus' probing of the methods by which his appointed mission should be carried out. This sense of mission grew through Jesus' public career of teaching and healing into final form in the declaration of messiahship at Caesarea-Philippi. But it is actually more illuminating to put the matter the other way around; Jesus' conception of messiahship grew out of his sense of a unique mission or job to do. And this in turn he interpreted in traditional Hebraic fashion as his response to God's call to him. Thus we see in the case of Jesus no less than in that of the prophets the basic pattern of divine call and human response. And in the case of Jesus perhaps even more than in that of the prophets there is a consequent emphasis upon the categories of decision and action. Again and again Jesus speaks of religion as a matter of doing the will of God. Often the contrast is drawn between moral and social action, and the performance of a ritual or profession of belief.

These same categories of divine call and human response and obedience apply to Paul. It may be conceded that upon occasions—though fairly rare occasions—Paul talked like a gnostic or devotee of one of the mystery cults, as some scholars delight to point out. But I think it is demonstrable that the basic categories of his thought and faith were Hebraic. In short, Paul was a Hebrew rabbi who found the Messiah in Jesus of Nazareth. It is therefore altogether natural to find in the experience on the Damascus Road which made a Christian of Paul the usual Hebraic pattern of divine

call and human response. Christ — God in Christ — as Paul would have said, called Paul and Paul responded and yielded up his life in obedient and active service.

If we may read between the lines of Paul's life, we may say that Christ had been calling Paul long before the Damascus road. If we may analyze and interpret the conflict in his mind and heart of which Paul speaks in Romans, we may fairly interpret it as a struggle between the religious and national pride of a Pharisee, and the religious universalism of Hebrew prophetic religion which Paul was correct in seeing in Jesus and Jesus' early followers. In this conflict Paul sought to unite his cleft personality, as so many others have done in similar circumstances, by persecuting someone. But the insistent call of Christ gave him no peace, and finally on the Damascus Road, broke through Paul's last defenses, bringing him to his knees and to himself.

Not only in Paul's life, but in the theology in which he sought to interpret that life, we find fundamentally Hebraic categories of religion. Paul constantly referred to himself and to his fellow Christians as servants of Christ. The doctrine of the new covenant which played such an important part in Paul's thought, and indeed in the whole early church, expresses a characteristic Hebraic sense of historic mission. The Pauline doctrine of election also shows this same character. Or conversely, it may throw light on this doctrine, so often treated by both friend and critic as an arbitrary and opaque element in Christian thought, to see it in the great tradition of Hebrew religion. Fundamentally, I think Paul meant by election what the prophets before him had meant by being called of God, and the experience of this vocation played the same basic part in his life and thought that it had played in theirs. A careful inspection of the relevant passages in the Pauline epistles will, I think, support this interpretation. And if this be true, it follows that in his doctrine of predestination, Paul was seeking simply to work out logically the implications of an experience so real

and so important to him. If the Christian gospel is man's response to God, the question arises: What of those who do not respond? Paul, of course, had in mind his fellow Hebrews. Just two answers are possible. One may say that for any one of a variety of reasons man does not heed God's call, or one may say that God has not called such persons. Paul, of course, chose the second alternative, thus involving himself and many succeeding thinkers in insoluble problems. But while we may not agree with Paul's conclusion we can surely see that he was dealing with a real question, foreshadowed in Jeremiah, a question set by the Hebraic categories of divine call and human response.

We may even trace this same pattern in what is often regarded as the least Hebraic section of the Bible, the Johannine literature. It is conceivably quite true that Greek gnostic categories of thought appear in the fourth gospel and the letters of John. But it may be successfully argued that they are more forms of speech than of thought. John may sometimes talk like a Greek but he thinks like a Jew. The Greek expressions are used for the purpose of making clear to the Gentile world a message which is basically Hebraic. Not only does the Hebraic emphasis on action and decision and the will of God appear throughout the Johannine books, but the major premise of John seems to be the genuine incarnation of the Logos in Jesus. To Greeks of a gnostic frame of mind anything like a real incarnation would be an unspeakable insult to the Logos, for the flesh and indeed the whole material world were essentially evil. It is a defensible view to regard John as a polemic book written in reply to such ideas, saying in effect: But God does become genuinely incarnate in the human life of Jesus. This, again, is a Hebraic concept and attitude.

III

Let us now turn from this very sketchy survey of the Bible to develop briefly a few of the implications of the Biblical doctrine of vocation. We have been arguing that the fundamental religious encounter is con-

strued by the Bible as hearing and doing the will of God, and that in the Bible this metaphorical symbol invariably takes precedence over the metaphor of seeing God, which in some nonbiblical religions goes on from communion to union with God. This distinction affects every aspect of religion, constituting the difference between pantheism and what is usually called theism, but which might better be called religion of revelation. These two types of religion, while both professing monotheism, conceive of God in radically different fashion. For pantheism God is an impersonal absolute, while for Biblical religion he is living will. For the eastern religions the very idea that God might have a will is repugnant, for will is a trait of finite, mortal life. To have a purpose or desire is part of man's bondage, and his salvation consists in rising above all such things to the calm peace of Nirvana. Thus to attribute purpose to God is to derogate from his absoluteness. But for Hebrew religion of the Bible, God's holy will is his very essence.

We see the practical importance of this distinction as we consider the relation of God to man, and the nature of man. For the Asiatic religions man reaches God by transcending all his mortality by contemplation or vision — or better, by a process of abstraction or stripping off all that binds man to the earth. Sometimes this process is compared to peeling away the successive layers of an onion, with the significant conclusion that when the process is complete nothing is left. Reinhold Niebuhr has vividly described this way of salvation as putting a ladder up to eternity, climbing the ladder, and then pulling it up after you. Now in sharp contrast to such concepts, the Bible tells us of a God who speaks to us, or who reveals himself to us. And the content of the revelation is the disclosure to man of God's will. For man, the proper part is to hear, obey, and do. Thus we see that man's practical life is invested with a meaning which is completely lacking in the eastern religions. For the eastern religions the only meaning in life is to climb the ladder to eternity where all action ceases.

From this there follow basic differences in the conception of human nature. It might perhaps be said that if man were simply mind, God would be accurately described as the impersonal ground of that thought which is the mind's very being. This perhaps explains the attraction of Hinduism for certain types of philosophic minds. Hegel skirted the edges of it and Schopenhauer embraced it. There is, in short, more than a suggestion of it in all serious, thoroughgoing idealism, which might be defined as that form of philosophy which regards man existentially as mind. But the plain fact of the matter is that man is more and other than mind. He is action, and action of a distinctively human sort quite different from the motion of bodies or even the growth and decay of organisms. Human action is action which is freely intended and then done. Man is thus at bottom not a set of ideas but a system of intentions. Existentially, in other words, he is not thought but action, and even thought may be conceived as a type of action—one of the things we do. The relevance of the Biblical categories of religion becomes apparent when we start not from thought or theory but from the life of action and seek to relate ourselves as active beings to God.

Biblical religion must always appear to pure theory as less consistent than monistic pantheism. As Santayana somewhere says—that life should have a meaning—how impossible a conclusion, yet how necessary an assumption. We have already seen the impossibility to pantheistic monism of the conclusion, for pantheism swallows or quenches all meanings in the transcendent and eternal one. Theoretically there must always be something of paradox about Biblical religion. But assuming the standpoint not of theory but of practice, of action, we shall begin to see the relevance of the Biblical categories. That is, assuming, as in action we all do and must assume, that life has a meaning, the Biblical faith can make that meaning clear and intelligible to us.

It provides us with a distinctive conception of ourselves. The living God of the

Bible who has a purpose for man and who communicates it to man also characteristically creates man in his own image. This divine act logically implies a voluntaristic or active conception of man rather than a purely intellectual one. I mean by this simply that action, as defined above, is a more basic category than thought. Or, again, man is existentially not an idea or system of ideas but a unity of purposes or intentions expressed in action. If we put the question to the Buddhist or Hindu, What am I?, the answer must be, a fragment of the eternal reason who by the discipline of contemplation, meditation, and the like, may return to the divine source. If we put the same question to the prophets and Jesus we shall receive the answer that the human self is a center of initiation for action, a will patterned after God's will for the purpose of serving its Creator. And mind, once more, is to be understood within this practical or active context as a force to enlighten and direct action.

It is interesting in this connection to note that Toynbee, in his discussion of "withdrawal and return" of creative personalities in history, holds unequivocally that the person who, having "withdrawn" for illumination, returns to the active work of society is superior to the man who finds the end of life in pure contemplation. Toynbee follows Bergson in speaking of such experiences as mystical and in thus holding that the active mystic is a better man than the passive mystic. One might properly raise the question whether, in the correct meaning of the term, this active religion is mysticism at all. The great mystics have almost uniformly found the end of life in contemplation. It is rather prophetic religion, or religion of revelation which finds the end of life in the active service of God. But it is enough perhaps that regardless of terminology there is essential agreement in the relation of contemplation and action, of theory and practice.

From all this there follows also a characteristic conception of freedom. There is a significant conception of freedom in Ori-

ental religion — the freedom of contemplative detachment — the freedom of the mind to pull itself up out of the change and decay of all mortal things to the timeless vision of God and then to union with God. But for the Bible freedom seems rather freedom to decide and then to make one's decisions effective in action. One sees this kind of freedom in both God and man in the notion of the covenant, so important in Hebrew religion from Abraham to Paul. Such a notion of freedom carries with it the corollary of responsibility. Man who thus chooses is answerable for his choices, and that is what responsibility means.

The Biblical emphasis on the active life is fulfilled in the idea of love. Nowhere is the contrast with Oriental religions sharper than in this contrast of passionless peace versus active love. Love may be understood in terms of volition and action. Now volition is related to impulse—to what some psychologists like to call the motor-affective life. But while impulse is the raw material of which volition is made, volition is something more than impulse or desire. For the categories of freedom, self-awareness and responsibility supervene upon the raw stuff of human impulse. Will or volition is thus what impulse becomes in the life of a free, self-conscious, responsible being. But will is also a social concept; it has its being in freely confronting and dealing with other wills. Its essence is thus communal or social. Apart from other volitions or wills, no will would or could exist. Apart from other persons, no personality could exist. The Robinson Crusoe notion of personality is simply a vivid statement of the lie at the heart of modern individualism. There is, of course, a truth in individualism. I as an individual am a center of initiation for action. I stand in a different relation to my actions from your relation to my actions. To be an individual means to be effectively a center of initiation for acts. But my acts must always involve other individuals; the very act of intending or willing involves other people. But if personality is thus essentially communal in nature, that means that it has its fulfilment in intending or

purposing the good of others. We become persons, what we were meant by God to be, just to the extent that we intend the good of every other human being. Our love, the law of God for humankind, is simply that quality of human action whereby a man intends the good of another, and at its widest and best of every human other. It must also be emphasized that this action is a free commitment which thus goes beyond every natural or organic tie that binds man to family or tribe. It is therefore universal.

Despite the fact that man's essence is thus love, it must be added that in any given situation there will be a gap between what he is and what he ought to be. For it will be plausible to the point of inevitability for a man—for any man—in his specific individuality to see self fulfilment in one or another form of self-assertion or self-aggrandizement. Thus arises the struggle, which for Biblical religion is the basic moral problem, of self-will versus brotherhood. To go further into this problem would take us beyond the bounds of this paper; we must again simply note the way in which the problem derives from what we have described as the fundamental categories of Biblical religion—divine call and human response.

Finally we must note the way in which the sense of historic mission derives from this same source. We have already pointed to it as a trait of Biblical religion from Abraham to Paul. It is not too much to say that this sense of mission or destiny has always been present whenever Biblical religion has been taken seriously; its presence may even be taken as an accurate barometer of the real vitality of that faith. For to believe seriously in a God whose nature is holy and loving will, and to believe in oneself as made in his image to do his will, creates the notion of history as the arena where God's promises and God's commands are worked out in judgment and redemption. The cyclic conception of history is broken, the cosmic wheel is shattered, and one sees history as a drama with a beginning, a climax, and a resolution. It is extremely hard to find a meta-

phor which expresses adequately the Biblical notion of a meaningful history. Yet the conception of a drama comes as near to adequacy as any we can find just because it does justice to these categories of which we have spoken.

Attention must now in closing be called to the relation between the nature of Biblical religion and the specific tasks and aspirations of the Fellowship of Socialist Christians. If what we have said is at all true, we cannot easily imagine a Fellowship of Socialist Buddhists, or Hindus, or even mystics, if the mysticism be taken entirely seriously. I do not wish to deny that Buddhists or Hindus or mystics can be good citizens or good socialists. But I do wish to deny that they may consistently find guidance and inspiration for social

action from the heart of their religious faith. Our Fellowship ought never to forget, or indeed to let Christians on the one hand or socialists on the other hand forget, that the Hebrew Christian faith of the Bible is in its very essence an active, a moral, and a social faith. To be sure, a religious faith is never a substitute for specific facts of social analysis. But on the other hand the facts, while always necessary, are no adequate guide to human action, as many of our positivistically minded contemporaries seem to think. Human action needs also an ultimate frame of reference and that our religious faith can give us. The point of this paper has been that Biblical religion gives such a frame of reference which is truly adequate.

CONTRIBUTORS

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GOD, GODS, AND DR. GEORGE GALLUP

By CHARLES D. KEAN

We live today in an age of cosmic warfare. The Christian insight into the meaning of our times reveals that in very real degree we are fighting "against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places." Religiously speaking this era of post-war re-adjustment is a warfare of the Gods on a world scale.

It is not merely indulging in a flight of poetic fancy to see that modern man, whether he knows it or not, is taking part in a "*Götterdämmerung*." The demands on his life which he has taken for granted to be of the eternal order of things are disintegrating in their effectiveness. The great religious problem of the day is not whether modern man is Godless, but whether he can survive the Twilight of the Gods of Twentieth Century Western culture, and if he does survive to which demand will he surrender his life.

As the cosmic warfare goes on, reflected in the confusion of the world, underlined by the threats of war and the rumors of wars, with uncertainty as to tomorrow as the keynote, Dr. George Gallup, the social statistician of Princeton, N. J., decides to find out how many people in the world "believe in God," and to draw certain deductions from his statistical findings. To men and women over whose heads hangs the threat of meaninglessness even more dangerously than the threat of the atomic bomb, comes a ring on the doorbell, and there on the step stands an investigator with his form ready and his pencil out.

"Do you, personally, believe in God?" he asks. "Please answer either, 'yes,' 'no,' or 'don't know.'"

As a result of his investigations in eleven different countries, Dr. Gallup has discovered the proportion of people who say they believe in God. He has also ascertained that few avowed Communists in France admit to such a belief, and from this he has

drawn the conclusion that the struggle between the U.S.A. and the U.S.S.R. is a struggle of the people of God against the Godless.

Dr. Gallup's investigation and his report are a combination of the nonsensical and the dangerous. There is no doubt that his statistics are accurate — that any other investigating force using the same general methods on as extensive a scale would come back with approximately the same result. The reason that the investigation is nonsensical is that the question has no existential meaning. The reason that it is dangerous is that it tends to confuse the fundamental meaning of the post-war problem.

To many who read Dr. Gallup's report, and apparently to Dr. Gallup himself, since he signed the article giving the results, these statistics on the proportion of people believing in God are supposed to be a barometer of religious faith and also an indication of social direction. It is doubtful whether many readers grasped the fact that the report was semantic nonsense, even though any one who took the time to read more than the headlines and lead paragraphs, and to figure out the significance of the question and answer for himself could discover the nonsensical nature of the survey. (This writer tried the experiment with twenty High School Juniors who in the course of free discussion worked this fact out and knew why.)

Whenever men objectify religious concepts — as if these had some kind of significant reference apart from the self-understanding of the people using them — they are in for trouble. There is no place where the religious confusion of the modern world is more clearly discernible than in the area of terminology, because in so many instances the words have been cut off from a practical, functional relationship to the lives and situations of the people using them.

It is doubtful whether many people who fear the increase of "Godlessness" have any clear conception of what they are talking about. They do not think of their problem as a battle of the Gods for the allegiance of men who are trying to find meaning for their lives, but rather they are inclined to think in terms of institutional loyalty, or if not that as such in terms of traditional allegiance to the corpus of social ethics and conventions.

It is certainly doubtful whether the average man who read Dr. Gallup's report, or even the average investigator who went about asking people's opinions on the deity, said to themselves, "More and more people seem to be uncertain as to themselves being subject to an unconditioned demand." While few people would actually use that language in that form, it is quite unlikely that they meant the same thing in other words.

By placing the religious problem of our day in this form, it is made very difficult if not impossible to recognize it for what it is. God, as the questioners present the issue, is cut off from meaningful contact with history and is made, in one sense, dependent upon the opinions of the people questioned. At the same time those who try to answer the query, unless they themselves clarify the problem in their own minds, are in the position of giving out opinions as to the existence or non-existence of a reality without taking into account that the question involves what they understand to be the meaning of their own existence. If they do understand that the question can be used meaningfully on an existential level, it is difficult to give any reply, and it is certain that any reply will to some extent distort the statistical findings.

On the other level of Dr. Gallup's concern with God, the whole investigation is dangerous because it confused a very real and serious problem by casting its significance into what is largely a Roman Catholic ideological form. The issue of the struggle for a tolerable kind of commonwealth for the people of Europe, and an adequate balance between the U.S.A. and

the U.S.S.R., certainly does reflect a religious war, but not as Dr. Gallup appears to understand it. Nor is it simply the common statement that Communism has religious significance to Russians and therefore two peoples with two different faiths are struggling for world mastery.

Dr. Gallup both oversimplifies the problem and places it in such a frame of reference as to arouse emotional reactions which really reflect the underlying confusion rather than man's intention to achieve a more or less peaceful world. It is doubtful whether Dr. Gallup's conclusion that 94 percent of Americans who say they believe in God are on "the side of the angels" merely because they hold to that belief, or say they do. And it is certainly doubtful whether there is any meaning at all to the discovery—if it is a discovery—that the French Communists, interviewed as such, tend almost unanimously to disbelieve the existence of God.

By placing his results in the form he does, and by his comments on them, Dr. Gallup ignores the struggle of the gods, and defines the political and economic struggle of the post-war world as a simple matter of good against evil. This both plays into the hands of Vatican strategists in that it leads people to accept their definition of the issue at stake today, and it also tends to dull people's perception of the political and economic inadequacies of American policy at home and abroad.

While there is a real reason why Communist aggrandizement must be resisted, and the creative aspects of Western democracy both protected and propagated, that reason is not simply that God is on the side of the U.S.A., or vice-versa, while the Russians and their followers eschew Him. It is tragic that this problem may be understood by the readers of Dr. Gallup's report to be definable by statistics on the number of people believing in or denying the existence of a supreme power in the universe.

According to Dr. Gallup's statement, the percentage of those who replied affirmatively to the question, "Do you, personally, believe in God?" was as follows: Brazil, 96;

Australia, 95; Canada, 95; United States, 94; Norway, 84; Finland, 83; Holland, 80; Sweden, 80; Denmark, 80; and France, 66. The British people were asked the questions in somewhat different form making accurate statistical relationship impossible. Their percentage would be approximately 83.

Going on with the thesis that there is a correspondence between the growth of Communist influence and man's opinions about the deity, the following break-down by parties is reported from France — Communists: Yes 17%, No 64%, Don't Know, 19%; Socialists: Yes 50%, No 29%, Don't

Know 21%; Union of Left: Yes 62%, No 18%, Don't Know 20%; R.P.F. (Gaullists): Yes 88%, No 5%, Don't Know 7%; M.R.P.: Yes 92%, No. 5%, Don't Know 3%; and P.R.L.: Yes 93%, No 7%.

It is amazing that Dr. Gallup sees nothing strange in 17 percent of the Communists believing in God, and 5 percent of a Roman Catholic party denying the belief. The whole business represents a tragic confusion of ideas and a basic misunderstanding of life — perhaps symptomatic of the general American inability to come to grips with the real significance of this stage of history.

PLANS FOR THE FUTURE

The Mid-Winter Conference of the Fellowship of Socialist Christians, in New York, February 2, voted to undertake plans for expanding the influence and organization of the Fellowship. A letter from Dr. Niebuhr is going out to members, inquiring as to their willingness to give support to such a program. The proposals discussed at the conference include the preparation of pamphlets and publicity. A representative of the Fellowship on a part-time basis might handle business affairs and assist local chapters. Evidence was presented of interest in several areas, and it seemed likely that new chapters would organize, if some encouragement were given from a central office.

The Fellowship will keep its present name, at least for the present. Many members feel that the F.S.C. is well enough known that a change would be disadvantageous, and might seem to imply a retreat from radical principles. Proponents of change made clear that they advocate no change in principles and purposes, but that the word "Socialist" in American idiom usually signifies something more rigid or doctrinaire than F.S.C. principles. Since many members support the present name and others have no concrete suggestions of improvements,

the conference favored keeping the present name.

The program for the Conference included afternoon and evening meetings, addressed by members. Dr. Franklin H. Littell of the University of Michigan spoke on "New Forms of Christian Social Expression." The main emphasis was upon small Christian fellowship groups within the church as a means for dynamic revival of Christian theology, faith, and discipline.

Dr. John Bennett of Union Theological Seminary spoke upon the topic, "Ethical Aspects of Our Present Political and Economic Situation." His main stress was upon the American responsibility in the international situation. Here he asked for a positive program rather than a policy of anti-Russianism. The vigorous discussion following the address gave expression to a variety of views concerning the necessity of flat opposition to some of the aims of Russia and communist parties, and concerning some specific policies of American foreign policy in Europe. A strong consensus emerged, however, on the need for advancing ERP as a positive program, with no conditions which might prove embarrassing or harmful to European nations.

R. L. S.

THE PRACTICE OF FAITH¹

By W. BURNET EASTON, JR.

Faith is Hard

To practice the life of faith is hard, far harder than most people realize. By this I do not mean that to achieve an intellectual faith on the one hand, nor a superstitious faith on the other is hard. But really to live a life of Christian faith is hard.

An intellectual faith is a relatively easy achievement for most people. Almost everybody believes in some sort of God. A God seems to be a necessary presupposition for most basic questions. To believe in some kind of a God actually raises fewer intellectual problems than to believe that the universe and the emergence of *homo sapiens* is the result of blind chance and an unaccountable series of fortunate accidents. But it is one thing to believe in God as a necessary intellectual proposition and quite another to expect Him to act in the daily routine of our lives. Christian faith is something considerably more than an intellectual assent to the idea of God, although it naturally includes such an assent.

Neither is Christian faith a superstition, although it is frequently confused with superstition by those outside the faith and all too frequently by many inside. Among the less rigorously intellectual, and this constitutes the great majority, a superstitious faith is also easy. So many unexplainable things can and do happen to the average person in the course of a lifetime that a system of superstitious interpretations becomes quite natural. But a real Christian faith is not a superstition. The distinction is that a superstition believes that by fulfilling (or failing to fulfill) certain more or less legal requirements or formulae, Fate, or the gods, or the saints, or even God Himself can be manipulated for man's benefit, chiefly in terms of this world; whereas

Christian Faith, while it trusts God absolutely, knows that God can never be manipulated. Christian faith is the faith that God really acts in history and in the details of our mundane lives and that all His actions are good. But it recognizes that any attempt to control God is blasphemy.

To put this kind of Christian faith into practice is hard. The failure to recognize how hard faith is is one of the causes of our failure to think Christianly. It is one of the sources of misunderstanding which causes much of the modern religious difficulty. Although I am a Churchman who believes that it is impossible to live the Christian life apart from some Christian Church, in all honesty it must be confessed that our churches are largely to blame for this situation. Ministers and priests talk about faith and exhort people to have faith, but all too frequently they imply that faith is easy. "All you have to do is merely believe," they say. Perhaps that is all you do have to do to have an intellectual faith, but belief does not become a convincing, working belief until it ends in action. That is not easy. To believe intellectually may be easy, but to risk my security or the security of those dependent on me, to live from day to day taking willingly life as it comes, to accept misfortune as well as fortune as coming from God and all therefore good, is a terribly difficult achievement. Really to believe — to believe that the frustration of my hopes is also a part of God's trustworthiness and care for me is no easy thing. Christian faith is hard, far harder than many of our religious leaders imply that it is.

There are at least two reasons why the Christian faith, in the sense that is here presented, is hard for modern people to accept. One is that as the writer of the Epistle to the Hebrews put it: "Faith is the assurance of things hoped for, a con-

¹ This article represents a chapter of a forthcoming book by Mr. Easton, *Thinking Christianly*. (Ed.)

viction of things not seen.”² But our generation is exceedingly skeptical of what it cannot see. We agree with Dorothy in *Gentlemen Prefer Blondes* when she said: “A kiss on the hand may feel very good but a diamond tiara lasts forever.” In the Sermon on the Mount, Our Lord tells us: “Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow; they toil not, neither do they spin: yet I say unto you that Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these.”³ We reply that unquestionably this is poetically beautiful but when all is said and done we are not lilies. We have mouths to feed, children to educate, and the rainy day to prepare for. Such beautiful expressions are pleasant to listen to in church and we like to hear them once in a while when everything is going well, just as we like to hear statements about “getting back to spiritual values.” When the pinch comes, however, and we are faced with an actual choice — say, between a better paying job or a spiritual principle — most of us will let God take care of the lilies while we find very good reasons for taking the better job. For most Twentieth Century people, even people who try to be Christian, this world and its values are more real and more significant than any spiritual or eternal values. One of the most revealing aberrations of American thinking is that we stamp on our coins, “In God we trust.”

This preoccupation with the temporal is one of the reasons why faith is hard. Christianly speaking, we ought to live in terms of the eternal. But this world is too much with us. Being the finite creatures that we are, we are concerned with creature comforts, and none of us can completely escape this condition, certainly not easily. Even the churches fail to achieve a real faith perfectly. One of the tragedies of our day and one of the reasons for the failure of the Church to speak authoritatively is the number of Churchmen who talk about faith in God but put their trust in political power, or ritualistic formulae or popular programs.

Faith And What is Good

A second reason why faith is hard will be more difficult for many good people to accept. It reveals how completely revolutionary thinking Christianly can be. This reason is that our ideas of what is good and what is bad are superficial and confused. We have mistaken ideas of what is good for us.

Strange as it may seem to say it, the simple fact is that what really constitutes the good and what really constitutes the bad is more difficult to determine, more complex and less certain than most of our simple moralizing would indicate. The great Russian writer Gogol once observed: “It is sad not to see any good in goodness.”⁴ Perhaps such a statement is too pessimistic, but certainly all of us are aware of how frequently good intentions turn out badly, and how bad intentions frequently have surprisingly fortunate results. All of us know “good people” who are most unattractive, and “bad people” who are most attractive. Indeed, it often seems as though the “bad people” were more attractive than the “good people.” Goodness, however, if there is any sense to life, *ought* to be attractive, and badness *ought* to be unattractive. There is something mixed up here that is not solved by simple moralizing. Since this point is highly controversial, it needs some further amplification and illustration.

First, an illustration from the social area: In the middle of the nineteen thirties there was a very strong pacifist movement in England. What the reader may personally think of the wisdom of pacifism is beside the point. From the point of view of sincerity, motive, intention and goal (and this is the only point of view from which Christian judgment can be given), the movement was motivated by the highest Christian principles. It was led by the late Rev. Dick Shepard, a Christian saint if there ever was one. The moment reached its climax at the time Mussolini was getting ready to launch his Ethiopian campaign.

² Hebrews 11:1.

³ Matthew 6:28, 29.

⁴ I am indebted to *Destiny of Man* by Nicholas Berdyaev for this quotation and for some of these ideas.

Finally the movement brought about a plebiscite in England in which about 12,000,000 adults voted that they would never support king or country in war. Mussolini wanted Ethiopia and he knew that the real obstacle to his ambition was not the League of Nations (that, as he early demonstrated, could be by-passed). The real obstacle was the British Navy. The British Navy alone stood between him and Ethiopia. Would Britain risk war and use its navy or not? That was the real question for Mussolini. As John Macmurray has observed, Mussolini took one look at Britain and rightly concluded that a nation of that size with 12,000,000 active pacifists would never order its navy to stop him! What began as a sincere Christian endeavor to do good, to prevent bloodshed and stop war, diabolically produced the diametrically opposite results.

Consider the question from the personal side. Lying, stealing, forgery, murder, and breaking the law are wrong and bad and are generally considered "sins." At least so we believe and so we teach our children. Yet in the underground movements of Europe during the War there were many fine people, many of them sincere Christians, who did all these things. In fact, frequently these "sins" became actual virtues; perhaps they should not have, but the simple fact remains that they did. One of the finest Christian souls that I happen to know, a man whose Christian faith had been an inspiration to me and to many others, was in the French underground movement. He, himself, did not have to commit murder, but he aided and abetted others who did, and he lied, stole, forged, misrepresented, and generally broke the law. The record of the Christian Churches in the war, both in occupied Europe and in Germany, is a heroic record of which we are proud, as we should be, but in order to keep their Christian witness alive both the Churches and Churchmen continually practiced most of the things we call morally bad.

One more illustration. For many years I have worked with college students. Some time ago a young G. I. veteran came into

my office. Like many others he had married a sweet girl before going to war when they were both too young. For some three years they had been able to live on war and romance. But now he was back at college and they were faced with the humdrum routine of daily living together. Their marriage was headed for the rocks. In the next couple of months I spent hours with those two young people, and finally everything seemed to work out. They decided they did love each other and that they would stick together. They were very happy in this decision. Since both of them had slightly more than conventional Christian interests and since I knew that the man's uncertainty regarding his future career was one of the problems, I suggested that they go to a Student Christian Movement week-end conference on vocations which was coming up soon. The husband thought it an excellent idea although, because his wife was working, she could not get there until the last day. At the conference I noted that the G. I. was not taking much part and was spending most of his time with the grounds staff. I did not see either of them again until after Commencement; then I saw the wife. She told me that her husband had met a girl on the grounds staff at the Conference and, now he wanted to get a divorce. I have had many reactions from student Christian conferences but never one like that. What had seemed the very best Christian procedure to stabilize that boy and his marriage had done just the opposite.

What is really good and what is really bad is not so easy to determine. This raises very serious questions regarding the relativity of ethics which I cannot deal with here. I simply make this point to throw light on the question of living the Christian Faith. The second reason why faith is hard is because we are frequently mixed up regarding what is the truly good and what is the truly bad.

Most of us when we say a thing is good mean that it is what we consider good on *our own terms*; it is what we, in the private judgment of our own minds, have decided is good. Usually it is something we con-

sider good for our comfort, or our prestige, or our wordly success. Contrarywise, the things we call bad are the things which interfere with our comfort and our desires — pains, loss of prestige, failure, death. (This is one of the places that the this-worldly, secular values must dominate us. Our judgments of what is good and what is bad are made almost entirely in terms of this world.) When a man makes a success of something, we congratulate him. Perhaps we should, for we all like and probably need some praise from our fellowmen. But perhaps from an eternal perspective what we call success may not actually be as truly successful as we like to think. We all know people who have had too much success — the self-made man who worships his maker — and they are insufferable. Actually we learn little if anything from success. Success tends to confirm us in our own self-sufficiency and conceit. As Arnold J. Toynbee eloquently points out in his *Study of History*, the tragedy in the history of civilizations is that the Creative Minority who successfully meets one challenge to its society seldom if ever meets the second challenge successfully, for it insists upon applying the old formerly successful formula to a new and different situation. The same is true with individuals. The Christian psychotherapist, Dr. Fritz Kunkel, frequently ends his lectures something like this: "and now may you go out and make terrible mistakes!" or "and now may you go out and fail badly!" We can learn from failures. We usually learn nothing from our successes except, perhaps, arrogance. About the most difficult human achievement is to achieve real success and remain decently humble. This suggests that all our conventional patterns of what is good and what is bad are mixed up. We do not know what is really good or bad for us. What we call good may not be what God calls good. What seems to us unadulterated tragedy may be a part of God's ultimate scheme which is good and therefore good for us.

This position admittedly has implications which are very upsetting for our conventional morality. It is a hard doctrine to

accept. But it again illustrates what I mean by the revolutionary character of thinking Christianly. Actually from the Christian, that is, from the Biblical, point of view it is not as revolutionary as it appears. It has a sound Biblical basis. To take more or less at random some illustrations from the Old and New Testaments: When Joseph was sold into slavery into Egypt, it must have seemed pretty bad to him, yet actually the end result was the exaltation of Joseph and the preservation of his family and the historic Hebrew group. This was good even in temporal terms. Again, it must have seemed unmitigated tragedy to Hosea when he discovered his wife's infidelity; however, the result was that Hosea learned love, mercy, and forgiveness, not only as possibilities for himself, but as attributes of God. Out of what seemed evil God brought forth good, and the world has never been the same since. Once more, the Babylonian Exile and the Fall of Jerusalem constituted about as "bad" a time in the history of a people as one could ask for. The temple of their God destroyed, their king killed and their country devastated, the Jews were deported into a strange and foreign land. Yet out of that misery, God led hardier souls like the unknown prophet of Isaiah 40-55 to see the meaning of monotheism the role of vicarious suffering, and the universality of God.

Similarly in the New Testament, the early Christians who witnessed the stoning to death of Stephen must have found it exceedingly difficult to see any good in that event; it was a very black day for them. However, Stephen's martyrdom compelled the Christians to break their ties with Judaism and to scatter throughout the Roman Empire. It ended the attempt to make Christianity simply a reform movement within Judaism and led directly to the universalization of Christianity. And when Saul, "still breathing threats and murder against the disciples of the Lord"⁶ started for Damascus, the Christians must have quaked with fear, but on that trip Saul

⁶ Acts 9:1.

had his vision which changed him from a persecutor into the greatest Christian defender the Faith has ever had. Supremely, of course, is the case of our Lord Jesus Christ. From every human point of view His crucifixion was completely bad. Had any of us stood on Calvary that first Good Friday, and had we known anything of his life, we should have said that his crucifixion was absolutely bad with no good in it. It was unjust and it was unfair; no human rationalization could make it seem right. Apparently our Lord thought so too, for he cried out in his agony and despair, My God! My God! Why hast Thou forsaken me?"⁷ But today, looking back on that moment in the light of the subsequent Resurrection, we see that it was not really bad but only appeared bad. Indeed, it was the best and most glorious moment of history. Had there been no Crucifixion, there could have been no Resurrection. Men would still be stumbling blindly for a hope that had no historical reality. What from every human standard of judgment was completely bad, from God's point of view was good. God made good to come out of it.

This understanding should throw light on the problem of achieving a practical Christian faith for everyday life. However, it is hard, especially for Twentieth Century Americans flushed with undreamed-of power and with victory, and confident that a competitive free enterprise system is the *summum bonum* of political wisdom. It is terribly hard for an individual (or a nation) to admit that he does not know what is best for his own good. For Americans it is doubly hard, for even the humblest American has a sense of power and self-confidence which he absorbs unconsciously from his culture. To make such an admission requires a humility that is alien to our whole way of life. Yet it is the absolutely necessary first step to understanding the Christian faith and achieving the unanxious life.

Faith and the Capacity to Wait
In ordinary everyday mundane life, what

⁷ Mark 15:34.

does this Christian way of faith mean? It means something very different from an intellectual assent to a set of propositions; it means the capacity to trust God and therefore to trust life and all that it brings. It is the ability to admit that we do not know what is ultimately good for us, and to be willing to wait for God to reveal His will for us through prayer, worship, and circumstance. Being willing to understand God speaking to us through circumstances is especially important. It means that we recognize that the Cross which comes to us, even though it may appear a very tragic and defeating Cross, is not really bad, is not the final word, but that beyond every Cross there is a Resurrection for those who trust God. Above all, in our time of confusion, it means the capacity to wait for God to act. T. S. Eliot has some wise words: "I said to my soul, be still, and wait without hope

For hope would be hope for the wrong thing; wait without love

For love would be love for the wrong thing; there is yet faith

But the faith and the love and the hope are all in the waiting.

Wait without thought for you are not ready for thought;

So the darkness shall be the light and the stillness the dancing."⁸

Two things remain to be said. One is that, as this position implies, there are quasi-fatalistic elements in Christianity. Christianity is not completely fatalistic because a man is always free to defy God, to follow his own desires, to worship himself and his own creations, although such defiance and self-deification always brings with them their own frustration. In the last analysis a man must conclude whether all the things that happen to him in the course of a lifetime are the result of blind chance without reason or purpose (and then this life becomes a mad desperate struggle to beat the game, ending in the ultimate frustration of death), or whether life and all that happens is, in spite of

⁸ From East Coker in Four Quartets; Harcourt Brace and Co.

mystery, under the providence of a God who is good. Christian faith lives by the latter assumption. The doctrine of predestination found in St. Paul, St. Augustine, and John Calvin is a hard, hard doctrine which many of us find repulsive, but, however repulsive some of its applications may be, it basically tries to express a true Christian insight, namely, that God is in control of all of life.

Secondly, to say that Christian faith means to wait for God to act is not to say that we merely sit back, let the world go to pot, and do nothing. To wait in terms of Christian faith means that we do all the things that come to hand, do all that we can in the situation we are in under the light of the Will of God as we understand it, but we do these things without a sense of finality. We do what we see needs to be done but with a sense of expecting and a sense of waiting for God to act. While we do our best, for that is what God requires of us, we do not worry about the result of our efforts. We confidently let God take care of the results. And God will take care of the results (they may be very different from what we expected) or else the revelation of God in Jesus Christ is an illusion. If our efforts fail it may be God's rebuke, although no less a sign of His love, or it may be only an apparent failure and, on a larger plan than we can understand, a great success.

Lord,
Why should it be
So hard to see
They will for me?
This dream
This splendid thing,

That in my brain is singing
Night and day. . . .
Cameth it from Thee?
Or is it
Just my vain imagining
Born of my own conceits blown high?
Lord, I want to know
I pray,
But still Thou dost not say.
WHY?
Long have I prayed, Lord
But still
Am in the dark.
Unless —
Unless this be Thy will:
That I should try
And if there follows
Some success,
Thine answer: Yes!
And if I fail . . . ?
Also Thine answer heard
This dream was not Thy word.¹⁰

To live by the Christian faith is hard. It requires an awareness of the reality of the eternal world which is extremely difficult in our times. But in so far as we approximate it, we approximate the un-anxious quality of life that frees us for really creative effort. It produces the sublime nonchalance of faith which is the first fruit of Christianity. Best of all, as many can testify, although we do not reach perfection, as we start down the narrow road that leads to abundant life, the Grace of God meets us in unexpected places, and miracles — the only miracles worth bothering about — do happen.

¹⁰ From *Out of the Depths* by W. Burnet Easton Jr., *Theology Today* Vol. III No. 2.

BOOK REVIEWS

MAN FOR HIMSELF. By *Erich Fromm*. Rhinehart and Co. \$3.00.

Fromm's study of human nature is important for many reasons. It is an able study from a psychoanalytical viewpoint, which is however not bound to the narrower dogmas of any school. It reveals many fruitful points of contact between a scientific approach to human nature and a religious cure of souls, though it also betrays the weaknesses of a purely "scientific" approach, even when it disavows the pretensions of the complete detachment of the psychological objectivists. The study is finally important for religious students because it reveals what absurd misunderstandings of the Christian view of man scientists may have, even when they are generally as circumspect as Fromm.

Fromm understands the basic character of man's ambiguous position in the world. "Self-awareness, reason and imagination" he writes "have disrupted the harmony which characterises animal existence. Their emergence has made man an anomaly, a freak of the universe." This insight also supplies him with an understanding of the inadequacy of a purely biological explanation of the hypertrophy of human impulses, of the boundless character of human drives. He distinguishes his thought from Freudianism at another important point. He does not believe in the purely social and therefore relativistic interpretation of moral consciousness which is implied in Freud's definition of the "super-ego." He disavows moral relativism on the one hand and authoritarianism on the other. He believes that it is possible to give a scientific account of the structure of human existence. He would define conformity to that structure as good and defiance of it as evil.

Like most psychologists Fromm seems to know nothing of the strong anti-legalism of the New Testament or of any ethic gen-

uinely derived from New Testament faith. This may not be his fault. Traditional Christianity is unfortunately strongly legalistic; and one rather suspects that psychiatrists are called upon to deal with many pitiful victims of a graceless religious legalism. On the other hand they ought not to be so totally unaware of the polemic against legalism in the profoundest religious interpretations of human nature.

Unfortunately Fromm allows his polemic against authoritarianism to carry him to the point of disavowing the significance of duty, which he regards as the "internalization" of external authority. Though Fromm is neither hedonist nor relativist and therefore has a proper sense of the significance of the distinction between the desired and the desirable, he does not seem to realize that men have, among their other desires, the desires not merely to follow their desires. This is the sense of duty. It is not always obeyed. Nor does it give us a clear definition of the desirable; for its counsels are colored by the pressures and prejudices of our world. But unless we assume a perfect inner unity of personality there is something like the sense of duty.

Fromm rightly recognizes the limits of the sense of duty as an ethical resource. If his conception of the Christian love ethic were not so wrongheaded he would recognize an affinity between his own view and a religious viewpoint which declares that love is the fulfillment of the law. For him the Christian love commandment means that we ought to love our neighbors as a duty. He interprets love as Kant does. Actually the point of the love commandment is that love is the point where all commandments are transcended.

The primary tenet of Fromm's book is that self-love is legitimate and necessary. That is the point of the title, *Man for Himself*. "Love," he declares, "is a phenomenon of abundance. Its premise is the

strength of the individual who can give. To love another person is a virtue only if it springs from inner strength but it is a vice if it is an expression of the basic inability to be oneself." One gets the picture of a reservoir which can overflow only if it is filled to the brim.

The question is whether such a view does justice to the self's real relation to its world. The self is a center with an indeterminate series of periphera into the world. There are no exact boundaries between the self and its various communities of family, nation, etc. The more the self forgets itself and lives for this larger world, the more does it become truly itself and the richer is the content of its selfhood. The self's concern for itself always sets premature limits to itself. From the Christian standpoint the self-hatred which is supposed to make love impossible is actually the consequence of a too anxious preoccupation with self. The self-love which is supposed to make the love of others possible is actually the by-product of genuine self-giving. Fromm is quite right in seeing that it is not possible to move from self-hatred to love by moral injunction. He is also right in suggesting that many forms of supposed unselfishness are really expressions of selfishness in disguise. That insight, by the way, is contained in the Pauline observation, "If I give my body to be burned and have not love it profiteth me nothing."

But these insights still do not bring him to the central issue. The real problem of the self is that it seeks to contain itself as free spirit within itself as contingent existence.

The self in its freedom is too great to be contained within the self in its contingent existence. It requires an object of devotion beyond itself, and an indeterminate field of fellowship. A truly Christian view of self-realization, rooted in the paradox that "whosoever seeketh to gain his life will lose it and whoso loseth his life will find it" has little relation with the moralism which insist that we ought to be unselfish in order to obey a law given to man by fiat. It also has little to do with the

prudential calculations, according to which unselfishness is the best method of realizing the self.

Actually the Christian view is based precisely upon an estimate "of the proper functioning of our total personality" which Fromm regards as the hallmark of a humanistic ethic. But the Christian view recognizes that it is not so easy to measure our total personality. Fromm himself rejects the effort to arrive at self-knowledge by detached objectivity. He believes that interest is as important a path to wisdom as detachment. But if he were to trace the limits of interest, as well as those of detachment, he might come to the edge of the secret why Christian faith regards the sense of being judged from beyond the self as a necessary part of true self-knowledge. Whether we are judging our self or loving ourself we do after all have only one self. That self, as interested participant, is always involved in these processes; this is why self-knowledge is more ambiguous than the proponents of scientific objectivity in the study of human nature realize, and why self-love is more dubious than Dr. Fromm realizes.

It would not be a bad idea for both the proponents and the critics of "self-love" to drop the term. It is too inexact. The Christian criticism of self-love is primarily directed against the self's preoccupation with itself by which preoccupation it narrows and impoverishes its life.

The psychiatric proponents of self-love are afraid that such an impoverished life will be presented with the false cure of the law to be unselfish. Actually both admonitions, that the self ought to love itself and that the self ought to love others, are spiritually impotent. An insecure and impoverished self is not made secure by the admonition to be concerned for itself; for an excessive concern for its security is the cause of its impoverishment. Nor is it made secure by the admonition to love others because that is precisely what it can not do because of its anxiety about itself. That is why a profound religion has always insisted that the self can not be cured by

law but only by grace; and also why the profoundest forms of the Christian faith regard this preoccupation as not fully curable and therefore as requiring another kind of grace: that of forgiveness.

The debate between psychiatry and Christian faith on this issue is partly verbal and might be clarified by either eliminating or more sharply defining the word "self-love." But something more than semantics is involved. The point of the debate lies in the difference between the psychiatric analysis of various particular types of insecurity from which particular people suffer and the Christian conception of the precarious situation in which all human life stands and the efforts which all men make to overcome the basic insecurity of human existence by abortive attempts to establish a security which is incompatible with the very character of human existence.

Fromm indulges in one gross misinterpretation of the Christian view of life. He defines authoritarianism as a system of ethics which makes disobedience to authority evil per se and which equates authority with power. Biblical religion is an example of this kind of authoritarianism, in his opinion. "The sin of Adam," he writes, "is not explained in terms of the act itself. The sin was disobedience, the challenge to the authority of God." Elsewhere he defines Adam's sin more correctly as "the attempt to be like God" but he is not conscious of any difference in these two definitions. This means that he is unable to recognize that the sin of "trying to be like God" may be a very "scientific," which is to say a very accurate, definition of man's inclination to exceed his bounds, to obscure the contingent character of his existence, to violate the very structure of his existence. For the structure of human existence, which the psychiatrist is anxious to define accurately, is compounded of finite elements and elements of indeterminate freedom. Man's sin is not disobedience to a divine fiat but the idolatry of making himself his own end. There are enough errors in religious obscurantism and legalism to furnish grist for the polemic mills of the scientific

opponents of religion. They do not have to indulge in these ridiculous distortions of basic Biblical views.

REINHOLD NIEBUHR

THE KINGSHIP OF CHRIST. By W. A. Visser 't Hooft. New York: Harper, 1948. 158 pp. \$1.75.

Visser 't Hooft, general secretary of the World Council of Churches, here interprets for Americans the prevailing temper — confessedly Barthian — of European theology. He does a superb job. Here are the incisive statements, the ringing declarations, the prophetic fervor for which Barthian theology is so vigorous an expression. And here is a better balance, a more successful effort to make this European theology understandable to Americans than in other writings from this tradition. Probably no other book is available which so succinctly and clearly can help Americans to appreciate the faith which has emerged from European Christianity's battle with secular thought and pagan violence.

Two chapters are especially significant for the social message of Christianity. Ch. II, "The Proclamation of the Kingship of Christ in the Years of Struggle," is both a historical record and a vigorous refutation of orthodox theologies which separate religion from political and social responsibilities. Ch. V, "The Kingship of Christ in the World," represents the Christian eschatological faith as a call to active service in all areas of the world, including especially the state. These chapters, if read where they are needed most, will lay to rest once and for all the misconception that European "neo-orthodoxy" has no dynamic for social action.

Another misconception which is effectively answered is the notion that European theology is inherently pessimistic. Rather, says Visser 't Hooft, it has taught men what *hope* is, proclaiming that "Christ has overcome the world and *is already* King of kings and Lord of lords" (41). The author grants that Barth's earlier writings may have given some ground for misconceptions, and brings out the spirit of more recent writings which,

unfortunately, are largely unavailable in English.

Visser 't Hooft is more successful than some writers in showing that continental Protestantism does not involve either biblical literalism or creedalism. In days of bitter struggle the church, as always in its history, was forced to probe its inner convictions and find a sure standing ground. Thus it proclaimed its biblical faith and its confessional certainties, permitting no compromise with demonic or secular forces. All this is thoroughly understandable. Europe's Christian heroes and martyrs testify to the power of such a faith and such a theology.

But one must still ask whether this theology is as truthful as it is powerful. Here one must doubt that God's dealings with men are utterly unknown except to men who have read the Bible. One must question whether the particular interpretation of the Bible would ever have emerged except among scholars with particular theological presuppositions. Despite the power of some concepts, it is difficult to say in any exact way what is meant by the repeated insistence upon the cosmic significance of Christ's reign, by the idea that Christ's work had a world-transforming effect apart from its effect upon men.

The complete rejection of natural theology and natural law (far more radical than the Reformers' stand) and the depreciation of non-biblical disciplines make difficulties for the social significance of Christianity. On the one hand, it is admitted that the Bible gives direction rather than prescriptions for settling detailed social problems, that we must use our rational powers to understand the world. On the other hand, there is a disdain for any values and insights which come from non-Christian sources (p. 144). But it would seem that a Christian might find genuine religious significance in the vision and idealism of statesmen who have framed the Marshall Plan, though many of these men may never read the Bible or confess the Gospel. We should not overlook Christ's parables of the Good Samaritan and of the Last Judgment

(Mt. 25), simply because some so-called "liberal" theologies have overlooked everything except these.

The same general perspective leads to quite different problems in the Christocentric doctrine of the state. To say that the state can and should acknowledge Christ's kingship in an absolutely direct way — unless a platitude, as it certainly is not here — seems to land one in the old dilemmas of American "liberalism": e.g., choosing between pacifism and a holy war. Barth's own attitudes concerning the last war would seem to emphasize the difficulty.

Visser 't Hooft's book is magnificent *hermeneutic*; its theology, despite penetrating insights, is not entirely adequate. We may agree enthusiastically with his central contention that the Christian message is far more than either "old-style moralism" or "old-style pietism"; where we disagree in detail, we may find our thought seriously challenged.

As an incidental note, it is encouraging to see, from the footnotes, the number of valuable theological writings which have been published in the difficult years since 1941 in such countries as France, The Netherlands, Sweden, and Switzerland.

ROGER L. SHINN

GOD CONFRONTS MAN IN HISTORY.

By Henry Sloane Coffin. Scribner. 151 pp. \$2.50.

The title, *God Confronts Man in History*, would be understood in many circles today as referring to an analysis of historical problems in their fundamental dimensions, so that their contradictions and cumulative pressures are appreciated as the judgment of God upon this civilization. In using the title, however, Henry Sloane Coffin undertakes no such analysis in any real degree, but rather gives a simple, clear straightforward proclamation of evangelical Christianity at its best.

Dr. Coffin is concerned with history—and he understands history to be the area of human life in which individual and group decisions are made in the context of the rise and fall of social developments. But

Dr. Coffin is much more concerned with proclaiming the judgment and redemption of God through Jesus Christ in language which a modern generation can understand. The evident sincerity, warmth, and broad humanity of the preacher — for it is a sermon that we have here — is so convincing as to make the book appealing as a proclamation of the Gospel.

The power and conviction of Dr. Coffin's five sermons on the Christian Gospel is such that the book as a whole has a momentum which makes it possible to overlook partially the fact that it does not attempt to relate the Christian Gospel to man's understanding of himself and his era. In one sense, Dr. Coffin touches upon this in his indictments of prevailing attitudes, but in a more important sense he lets his proclamation carry itself and he trusts the reader to make contact for himself between his own living situation and the answer which is set forth.

Part of the problem of the modern world is that man cannot use the Christian interpretation to come to grips with his situation, because it more often than not appears to be an answer to a question he is not asking. The problem is furthermore complicated by the fact that without a Christian vocabulary he cannot ask a sufficiently penetrating question to get any worthwhile answer anyhow. The result of this problem is that evangelical proclamation may be accurate and challenging but it may fail to make effective contact with a real world, and it can very easily be objectified into a theoretical discussion about something unrelated to the reader's own world.

Dr. Coffin's own reputation and the utter simplicity and conviction with which he writes may make it possible for many people to find God confronting man in history as they read the book. This reviewer believes that such people would already have some interest or they would not make the discovery. Indeed, for those with a prior orientation this book would be a great inspiration and stimulation. But for the man who has not faced in the direction of the cross at all it does not seem to make a

sharp enough contact with the history he knows for him to recognize any hand of God there for him, even though he may acknowledge that Dr. Coffin sees it.

This review has taken this line because the problem of proclaiming a relevant Gospel which enables men to interpret the realities of this broken post-war world realistically and to relate themselves to significant movements functionally is the great unsolved question before Protestantism today. This reader does not believe Dr. Coffin tried to solve that problem as such, but this book is such a winsome presentation of the preaching of Christ Jesus that it ought to be even more usable than it will be.

In this little book, Dr. Coffin gives his experience and his message during his post-war tour of the Orient on the Joseph Cook Foundation of the Presbyterian Church. He visited China, the Philippines, Siam, India, and Egypt, and in most places gave five addresses on various aspects of the Gospel — all central, all fundamental. Dr. Coffin's judgments on the Tydings Act in the Philippines, for instance, as an example of American economic imperialism, and on the American reaction to Zionist political pressure at home show that history is very concrete for him. Not everyone will agree with all the implications of the latter judgment, but the picture of oriental reaction to this country is probably very much as he sees it and as such justified.

When it is understood that this book is modern evangelical preaching rather than an interpretation of history, as such, in a theological perspective, this little book will be of great value to inspire clergymen and to stimulate laymen. It ought to be widely read.

CHARLES D. KEAN

CHRISTIANITY AND CIVILISATION.

By Arnold J. Toynbee. Wallingford, Pa.: Pendle Hill. 1947. 51 pp. \$.25.

For many years Toynbee's Burge Lecture of 1940 has been his clearest answer to some of the problems involved in his interpretation of history. The monumental *Study of*

History is the work of a man of profound Christian faith. Perhaps rightly for a work of its type, it often seems to avoid or skirt the edges of certain theological problems which it raises. This lecture, long out of print and never widely available in America, comes directly to the point.

Toynbee here outlines a *cyclical* view of the history of cultures and a *progressive* view of religious development. The rise and fall of civilisations are vain repetitions, but they serve the advance of religion. "If religion is a chariot, it looks as if the wheels on which it mounts towards Heaven may be the periodic downfalls of civilisations on Earth. It looks as if the movement of civilisation may be cyclic and recurrent, while the movement of religion may be on a single continuous upward line" (P. 26).

This viewpoint may seem hard to substantiate simply on the basis of the evidence. But as John Bennett has noticed, Whitehead expressed a similar view: Religion "is the one element in human experience which persistently shows an upward trend." (*Science and the Modern World*, p. 275.)

The area of progress, says Toynbee, "is not the unregenerate nature of Man, but the opportunity open to souls, by way of the learning that comes through suffering, for getting into closer communion with God, and becoming less unlike Him, during their passage through This World" (P. 47). This idea is developed similarly in his more recent essay, "The Meaning of History for the Soul," in *Christianity and Crisis*, June 23, 1947.

With unnecessary modesty Toynbee has frequently disclaimed any theological pretensions. Perhaps this is the very reason that his deep spirituality often seizes upon Christian ideas with a freshness seldom shown by most theologians. We may hope for further excursions by this historian into the realm of theology, and further clarification of his thought. The essay being reviewed is listed for inclusion in a book, *Civilization on Trial*, scheduled for April 29 by Oxford University Press.

R.L.S.

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